

some of those surveillance photos, apparently this individual who had planted the explosive device had actually had his 3-year-old daughter carry the device to the area and place it in a trash receptacle and that is how the device came to be where it was.

Clearly we are dealing with a type of evil that most of us don't understand and can't understand. But this is the type of individual, this is the type of evil that is present in some of these areas, and this is the work that our soldiers are doing to combat that.

Again, this is a police station in inner city Baghdad. Six months ago I couldn't have gone there. Certainly 2 years ago there is no way. But now the Iraqi police are taking over. People feel safe. They feel safe to approach local law enforcement. In fact, when we left the building from this police station, out on the street a group of Iraqi men came up and was eager to talk with us. One of the soldiers found a translator for us, and we engaged in quite a lively conversation. To be perfectly honest, it was gratitude that was expressed on the part of the Iraqis who were there, gratitude for helping get their neighborhood back, and gratitude for helping get their country back. Again, it is the type of progress that you almost can't believe if you can't go there and see it yourself.

Mr. Speaker, one of the funny things is if this had been a year ago and we were here talking about Iraq, we would be talking about having yet another vote to get us out of Iraq. It seemed like every week we had that type of vote here on the floor of the House. And we are not doing that so much any more. I wonder why. Perhaps because things have gotten so much better there.

The news stories a year ago, day in and day out, a bad news story out of Iraq. Well, now you don't see those stories every day. You see odd stories like Ahmadinejad from Iran coming in to visit in Iraq, which I think is problematic. I wish it hadn't happened. But on the other hand, Iraq is a sovereign country and if Prime Minister Maliki wants to meet with Ahmadinejad, I guess. In fact, we have a Presidential candidate who said he will sit down with his enemies. Maybe Mr. Maliki had been listening to that Presidential candidate. I didn't think it was perhaps the wisest and best use of his time. After all, Mr. Speaker, a lot of the explosively formed projectiles that are so deadly, a lot of the IEDs and improvised explosive devices are made with materials that clearly come from the country of Iran.

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And that has been problematic for many, many months. And Iran's activity as far as continuing some of the disruption in this area, Iran's activity, has indeed, I think, been problematic.

We hear a lot about the lack of political progress, and those talking points probably need to be updated. The Iraqi

parliament recently passed four major pieces of legislation. They passed the de-Ba'athification reform, they passed an amnesty bill, they passed a provisional powers law, and a national budget. No question about it, there's still a lot of work to be done and that budget execution is one of those things that I watch very carefully because I don't know, you know, quite honestly, with the infrastructure that is there with their banking system, it's very, very difficult to distribute money to the local areas where it is so desperately needed.

But nevertheless, they are making the efforts. In fact, there are four things that the Iraqi parliament did this past year. I don't know what our track record is. I think we banned the incandescent light. I don't know that we've done much more in the past year, and there's four things that they've done.

One of the biggest changes that I saw last July and one of the things that really gave me great optimism, that one day we would have in Iraq a stable country that was able to govern itself, provide for its own security, provide for its own people and be a partner for peace in the Middle East.

Last summer visiting the city of Ramadi where the local political leaders, the local political shift that had gone on in that country; to be sure, the central government in Baghdad has some problems and they're going to have to work through those problems; they're going to have to find solutions to those problems, as any country would. But the fact that local leaders, like a county commissioner, like a mayor, like a county administrator, these are the guys and ladies on the front line. These are the ones the citizens turn to for help when things don't work right, when things go wrong. These are the individuals that should be the first line of contact. And indeed, in the city of Ramadi last summer and then again in this neighborhood, the al Hamandiyah neighborhood in Baghdad, the local political shift was very much in evidence. The local leaders were stepping up and doing the work that is required of local leaders. Still some difficulty getting the funding from the central government, but my understanding on this last trip was that that had improved even from 6 or 7 months before. Obviously, again, that's going to bear watching. And there are lots of areas in need of improvement. But all in all, the progress is going in the right direction.

You see that in other things, too. The national electricity hours are up. Some small water projects that were so desperately needed have now been completed. Some primary health care centers have been constructed and more are to open, all signs of progress. That was work you just couldn't do a couple of years ago because the security situation just would not permit it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I remember very well the arguments and discussions and

debate we had on the floor of this House just a little over a year ago in regards to what General Petraeus saw, what General Petraeus wanted to do, and giving him the ability, the tools to do that job consumed a lot of our discussion a year ago. But I've got to tell you, I'm glad we found the right man for the job. I'm glad we gave him the tools that he needs. And he certainly seems to be pursuing success with all due dispatch.

It's hard to know what the next steps are. You hear a lot of people talk about the troop drawdown that was essentially the surge, and as those numbers come back down are we going to come down below that. We're going to have to have a wait-and-see period. Obviously, in my mind, my opinion, those decisions should not be made by those of us here in the House. Those are decisions that should be made by the military generals on the ground.

We did have an opportunity in this trip, as we did last summer, to meet with David Petraeus at some length. We met with the general. We also met with Ambassador Ryan Crocker, a true patriot who's given now a year of his life to be in that country and to provide stability in that country. Things have not always gone to his liking, I'm sure, but nevertheless, I think he can point to a great deal of success.

I remember a year ago so clearly, you know, you could take data points almost and make whatever kind of case you wanted to make in Iraq. And General Petraeus stressed to us a year ago that it would be important to look at trend lines over time, that you just simply couldn't look at a collection of data points and make a decision.

When we visited with General Petraeus at the American embassy in Iraq, we kind of saw a preview of what he's likely to present to Congress when he comes back in March or April to give his interim report to Congress. He had a variety of charts up. You could see that the trend lines again were all moving in the right direction as far as number of attacks, as far as attacks on citizens, attacks on soldiers. The trend lines for things like electricity and water were going in the right direction, which was up. All in all, the story coming out was very positive. At the time we were there, something had just occurred which was a point of not some insignificant concern, the activity of the Turkish troops on the northern border which had the potential to be very destabilizing because, of course, the Kurdish regiments in that area have been functioning very well, and the fact now that they were being faced with some Turkish soldiers who had come across the border to deal with some terrorism aspects that they thought were going on along the border, clearly that needed to be managed and managed very quickly and apparently has been. But it did have the potential to become much more serious than it was.

I stated early on in the hour that there might be a place to draw the